



PASTORAL LETTER

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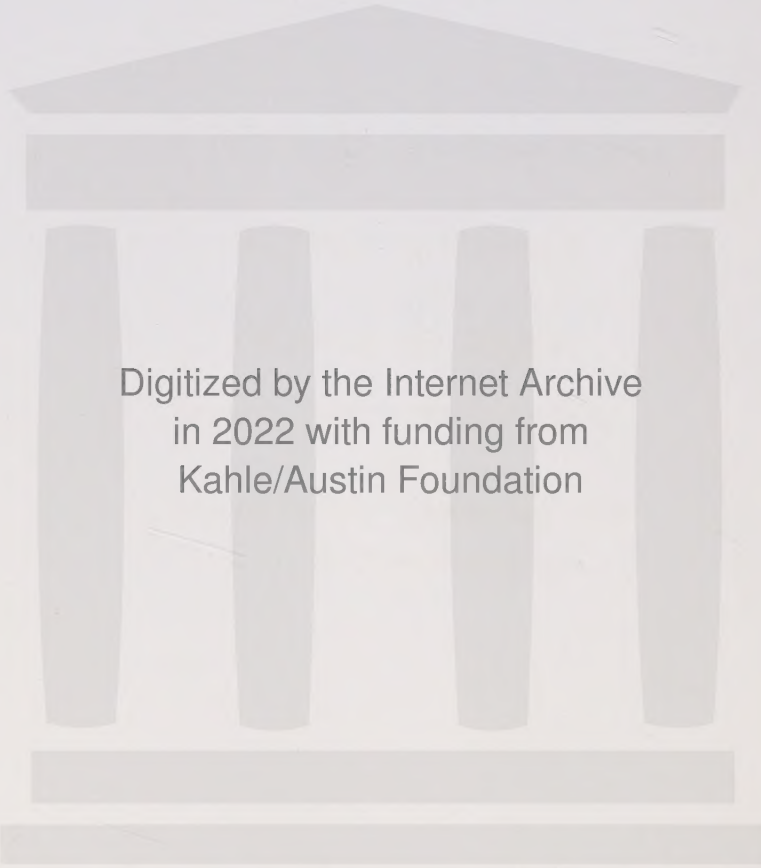
HOUSE OF BISHOPS

A.D. 1928

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PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
HOUSE OF BISHOPS

ADOPTED OCTOBER 17, 1928
AT
THE GENERAL CONVENTION
AT WASHINGTON, D. C.

New York, October 30, 1928.

I hereby certify that the following Pastoral Letter has been set forth by the House of Bishops, in accordance with Canon 21. § II. [v.] of the Digest of Canons.

Attest:

CHARLES L. PARDEE,
Secretary of the House of Bishops

Canon 21. § II. [v]. "Whenever the House of Bishops shall put forth a Pastoral Letter, it shall be the duty of every Minister having a pastoral charge to read it to his Congregation on some occasion of public worship on a Lord's Day, not later than one month after the receipt of the same."

A PASTORAL LETTER

Dear Brethren of the Clergy and Laity:

In sending you at the close of General Convention our message of pastoral interest, warning and encouragement, we, your Bishops, desire especially to emphasize certain responsibilities which, growing out of the very nature of the Church itself, rest as obligations upon us all.

The Christian Church is a society to which has been intrusted the preservation and propagation of the Gospel and through which normally men find salvation in union with God. But it is more than that. The Church is the Body of Christ and Christ is the representative of all humanity. The Church, His Body, is in ideal and ought to be in fact the prophecy of human destiny. It foreshadows the right relations of men to God and one another. When we speak of it as the family of God, we can rightly do so only in this prophetic sense. It is the inner group of the great family of all mankind, the group which is conscious of the sonship that belongs to all. Its function is not to draw men out from the human family but to make that family conscious of its real relation to God. The Kingdom for which the Church works and prays comes when men live like brothers in loving obedience to their Heavenly Father.

Civilization depends upon control of those divisive forces which prevent a family life. Progress as the Christian sees it is the overcoming of those same divisive forces by the power of God. Unity is its goal. Love, brotherhood, fellowship are only varying names for the spiritual means and motive by which men reach this goal. The Kingdom of God is the society in which the divisive forces are overcome and the goal is reached.

If the unity of society is the goal of man's striving, it is obvious that for the Church which foreshadows that goal and

has to lead society to it, unity is no subsidiary or chance ideal. It is essential. If the Kingdom of God is to come among men the unity of the Church must be won. The forces which by setting men against one another continually threaten society obviously cannot be conquered by a Church which has not conquered them itself. A divided Church implies a yet unconquered world. Yes, admits it, accepts it. In playing our part then as loyal Christians and Church people in the great and moving drama of life, we cannot escape the call to unity. One family of God, one world, one Church! By example, by service, by prayer we must seek unity.

We must begin with our own Church. No communion in Christendom has in respect to unity a more complex task than ours. Catholic in our unbroken continuity with the Christian ages and in the fullness of our Christian heritage, Protestant in our participation in the great 16th century movement of reformation and freedom, we have in the good Providence of God succeeded during four hundred years in holding together in some fashion those two fundamental types of religious experience and expression. But the extremes are far apart and often seem impossible to reconcile. The tension is at times severe.

We feel it today here in America as throughout our whole communion. One group seeks a fuller measure of what it counts Catholic. Another group is sick at heart lest some of those great values which we gained at the Reformation may be lost. One prays hopefully for reunion with the Church of Rome; the other seeks continually closer relations with Protestantism. In all this and much more which on the surface indicate irreconcilable differences we would see rather the working of forces which are alive, the evidence of the Church's attempt to meet the continually new conditions of a world which moves forward with terrifying rapidity. We see witnessed the great truth that Christianity is not a narrow one-sided carefully codified section of life; but a divine creative force sweeping into human history, seizing upon human souls with immeasurable power, resistless in its grip upon every aspect of life, making partisans as well as statesmen, prophets as well as priests. A Church which did not have new movements continually stirring its depths; in which there were no old hearts in despair and no young hearts

aflame with indignation or kindled by visions of the City of God, would, we venture to believe, be a dead Church.

The divisions among us are not to be mourned over. They are to be conquered. They are not causes for despair. They are challenges to the width of our view, the depth of our love, the soberness of our wisdom, and the steadfastness of our loyalty. If Catholic and Protestant cannot find a way to live together, and to worship together the one Lord whom both adore, "then is our faith vain. We are yet in our sins."

Two practical considerations are important. One concerns especially the clergy. There is little or no excuse for individualistic extremes such as often disturb the peace of the Church and its normal life. Let us have prophets, let us have life and initiative, but let us remember that there is a norm of teaching and of worship in the Prayer Book. The ordination vows of the clergy pledge them to loyalty to "the doctrine, discipline and worship" of this Church. These great words are nowhere accurately defined, but for a loyal priest desirous of doing his work honestly, not obscure in meaning! Loyalty does not consist in meticulous obedience to the letter of rubrics and canons. Such obedience may be rendered accompanied by real disloyalty to the spirit of the Church. Loyalty means the honest attempt to understand, to enter into and to express in one's ministry that spirit. It means the use of Prayer Book language, and the careful distinction between what is Church law or doctrine and what is merely the individual's wish or opinion. It does not forbid reaching out to the best in Christian experience wherever found. It does forbid the submerging of established usage in alien rites. It does not forbid freedom of criticism. It does forbid subversive conduct. Honest loyalty among the clergy breeds confidence and a sense of security among the laity. It is one great contribution to the task of unity.

But the responsibility for unity rests upon laity as well as upon clergy; and for all there is, to use St. Paul's phrase, a "still more excellent way," the old way of love. We have no right to distrust one another. No group of men is trying by insidious propaganda to wreck the Church. There is and ought to be the frank effort upon the part of clergy and laity to further truth as they see it. But we are all Christian brothers. We have the same Heavenly Father and the same Master

Christ. Instead of setting ourselves in opposite camps and labeling ourselves with partisan names we need to worship and work, to study and confer together. Our differences can be overcome not by the victory of one side over another, not by driving out the Catholics or defeating the Protestants but by the readjustment of the relation of truths and the discovery of new perspectives. We must seek the conscious and intelligent reconciliation of apparently irreconcilable views. Hitherto we have made an insecure reconciliation through our instinctive desire to hold together, but in many parts of the Church where in earnest fellowship our *Christian* tasks have been undertaken as *common* tasks, the goal we are seeking has come appreciably nearer. This General Convention with its fine unity of spirit is a striking illustration of such a result. Let us move on and with the guidance of the Spirit of Truth make unity secure by clearness of thinking warmed by the power of love, and complete trust in one another.

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Next to our responsibility as Christians for the strengthening and deepening of the unity of our own Church lies our responsibility for advancing the unity of the Church of Christ throughout the world. Of all the great movements which have stirred men's imagination and captured their allegiance during the last generation none has gained more rapidly than that of reunion. Thirty years ago men spoke of it as a mere dream. It has become a matter of practical and immediate concern. The Edinburgh Conference in 1910, the Lambeth Appeal of 1920, the Stockholm Conference of 1925, the Lausanne Conference of 1927, the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928, all witness the fact that Christians are beginning to understand that a divided Church is by the very nature of Christianity an indefensible—yes an impossible thing. To the extent that division exists Christ is absent. If we tolerate division, (again let us say it) "we are yet in our sins."

This is not the place to discuss in detail the various problems which must be met and overcome in the difficult search for unity. But three principles should be borne constantly in mind by every loyal Churchman. The first is that every baptized Christian is a member of the Catholic Church. Whatever his ecclesiastical name, he belongs to the great company of the elect; he knows something of the love of God in the Person

of Jesus Christ. Saintship is the monopoly of no communion. The unnamed saints of some obscure group of Christians may know as much of God as those whose names adorn our calendars. Such a truth must drive from our hearts arrogance and exclusiveness. It must make us hospitable to all truth, charitable, of comprehensive thought, with a vision of the Catholic Church big enough to include the full range of Christian life and experience. Where Christ dwells there must we be content to be found.

But as we move towards unity in this spirit of Christian love we must move in practical ways. And we must move! We cannot wait for a day when through some miraculous Divine intervention unity will drop upon us like a New Jerusalem from the heavens. We must seek for unity where the response is likely. In some directions the doors are for the present closed. But others are open. We must try those doors. We must be ready to go forward, to do something. We must dare to be misunderstood. We have heard it said that in America the Episcopal Church has led in the movement towards unity until now other Christians are ready to go forward, but that facing such a practical possibility the Episcopal Church holds back. That must not be.

But that brings us to our last point in reference to Church unity. No work of the leaders can bring unity without the co-operation of the people. Although unity cannot come without the careful scholarship of theologians and the wise statesmanship of responsible officials; neither can it come without the warm and vital interest, the loyal prayer, the sacrificial purpose of the rank and file of Christian people. Our Lord Jesus Christ summons us to unity. We must obey the summons.

The summons to unity is no less clear when we look out upon our task in the world. The mission of the Church, as we have already said, is the discovery to men of their relation of sonship to God and therefore of the unity which must be achieved if that sonship is to be made a living thing. The forces which divide men, selfishness, greed, lust, must be overcome by the power of God's love in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is come when human society has achieved its unity in Christ.

This mission is no mere voluntarily chosen policy. It is the very life of the Church. The Body of Christ has no other mis-

sion than to make all men part of Christ. Whether the Church works in New York or in Hankow; whether it preaches social justice or teaches little children, its aim is the same. Whether it concerns itself with the great problem of peace among the nations or the lesser problem of peace in a New England mill strike, or in the intricate personal problem of peace in a quarrelling family, its aim is the same. The love of God in Christ must bring unity. Divisive forces must be overcome.

The most momentous task which faces the world of today, is the warfare against war. Again and again the voices of prophets and statesmen have been raised to tell us that if war is not destroyed Christian civilization must be. That we believe is exaggeration. Christ is too strongly intrenched in human society to be conquered by war no matter how world-wide. God's purposes are too staple to be made mock of in the end by man's ignorance and wickedness. But war is destructive of what Christ stands for. War is degrading, brutal, bestial, like the devil the father of lies and hatred. It assaults all that dignifies and beautifies human life. It violates the sanctities of the soul. It hurls defiance at the Christian faith that men are the family of God. It challenges the Church of Christ to action.

Now it is not the business of the Christian Church to control governments. It cannot lay down in detail those plans and projects which it is the business of governments to formulate and carry out. But it is the business of the Church to speak in no uncertain way concerning the Christian view of life and the relations of men and nations to one another. It is its business to guide the Christian conscience in its approach to all such matters. It cannot therefore look on indifferently at war or (what makes for war.) It must put moral force behind the efforts for peace and a law governed world. Christ summons us to world unity as He does to Church unity. Such effort we would have you see is but part of the great mission of the Church.

In contrast with the vast reaches of the task of ending war or of restoring the unity of Christ's Church our own Church's mission as expressed in what we call its program seems small. It is, as measured in numbers, be they of persons or of dollars. It is not, as measured in eternal values. It is the same task of bringing unity in God's great family.

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The money which we contribute for carrying out the Church's program in nation, diocese and parish is our part in that task. The missionary whom we thus send out is preaching everywhere, as he preaches the Gospel, the message of the unity of men in God. The teacher in the parish school at home is helping the children of the Church to grow up in full knowledge of what their sonship really means. The social service worker is revealing the unity as well as the dignity of human life. The evangelist on the city streets is stirring the sleeping sense of kinship which lies hidden in all men's souls.

Varied messages and varied efforts they are which through support of its program we make possible for the Church, but all are guided by the same great ideal. All spring from the love of God which we his children know in Jesus Christ. All aim to transform this world of hating, covetous, warring men, dishonoring in their strife the Heavenly Father, all aim, we say, to put love for hate, peace and law for strife and chaos. All would create out of this bitter competitive struggle the co-operative life of the family of God.

These efforts are our efforts, dear brethren of the clergy and laity. This is all our task. In private life and public life, in the support of the Church's Program and in our influence upon the wider life of Christian people throughout the world Christ calls us to release the power of love that men may be gathered into the unity of the Sons of God. Only thus can God have His way among us. Only thus can He answer our daily prayer, "Thy kingdom come." Only thus can the Christ who died for us "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

